

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8Then they remembered his words, 9and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

A stone.

A big, big rock.

When I think of Easter I remember the stone. I think of it as a big disk, flat on the sides – taller than a man – huge - heavy. When it was in place the dead stayed dead and the living could not be bothered by them.

But God rolled the stone away.

And the world was bothered by Jesus once more.

We thought we were rid of him. He kept dragging God into all the places where we did not want God to be. Who wants to take God along to the movie? Or on a date? What does God understand about what it takes to get ahead at work? How could God understand why I need to unwind? Does God understand the gnawing of desire or what it feels like to be able to buy whatever I want? Does God know what it is like to be stepped on by another like a bug and how good it feels to get even?

But Jesus would not let things be. He kept showing up at the local bar. He'd remind us about God while we were talking about giving the poor and the criminals exactly what they deserve. He'd tell stories about a rich man in hell and a poor man in heaven - or a story about a father who celebrates the return of the unfaithful son while the hard-working son is not honored. We just wanted to live in the world six days a week without God – keep God in the temple but not God into my home or along to my parties. Don't let God interfere with my anger when I am letting it have its way.

So we killed Jesus because I want to be in charge of me.

And we rolled that stone to seal his tomb to keep him where he belongs.

And we built this nice church where we could come to share our memories of him.

But the women said that he is on the loose. He is not off in heaven or in the grave, nor is he imprisoned here.

He is alive.

He is free.

He won't let us be done with him.

Paul found that out. Paul was busy persecuting Christians. "Jesus is dead, dead, dead," he proclaimed. "Those who think otherwise will be dead, dead, dead, too." That was Paul's business. But Jesus appeared to Paul and blinded him – just killed that Christian persecutor. But then God did a strange thing: God raised up a Christian in that same body that the Christian killer had been in. Paul spoke of it as being untimely born. Now wherever Paul went, Jesus was. "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me," Paul said.

Easter is not about the possibility of the dead living once more. Quite frankly it would be harder for me to believe that dead is dead than to believe that the dead could live once more somewhere. But this day we remember that Jesus does not just live somewhere but is alive in this world. He was raised in the world where friends betrayed him, denied him, abandoned him. He was raised in the world where enemies spat upon him, mocked him, crucified him. God raised Jesus to claim his proper place as Lord, Lord here. Not sin, nor death, nothing in all creation can keep him from being Lord, your Lord.

Easter is about that self in you that wants to do without God dying. Easter is God smashing every stone that would keep God away from your life. Easter is about Jesus taking over you.

We tried it the other way. We have all tried to keep Jesus on the cross and us in charge. Every time we think we can get along without God ruling over us we try to nail Jesus back up there. It never works. We love and trust in ourselves above all and we find it never really works.

But God raised Jesus to be your Lord. He will not remain here in this place but he will go with you this day. There is no tomb for Jesus anymore. He is alive – raised from the dead that he might be Lord of your life now and for all eternity.